

# Sustainable Development Goal 16

The importance of good security sector governance for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda

### About this series

The SSR Backgrounders provide concise introductions to topics in good security sector governance (SSG) and security sector reform (SSR). The series summarizes current debates, explains key terms and exposes central tensions based on a broad range of international experiences. The SSR Backgrounders do not promote specific models, policies or proposals for good governance or reform but do provide further resources that will allow readers to extend their knowledge on each topic. The SSR Backgrounders are a resource for security governance and reform stakeholders seeking to understand and to critically assess current approaches to good SSG and SSR.

### About this SSR Backgrounder

This SSR Backgrounder addresses the importance of SSG/R for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their promise to leave no one behind. It focuses on SDG 16, which calls for peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, highlighting the role of security and justice institutions for sustainable development. The aims and principles of SSG/R are reflected in different targets of SDG 16 and can further be linked to other SDGs – for instance, on gender equality, sustainable cities, and global partnerships. This SSR Backgrounder provides an overview of these linkages and of national and local implementation of the SDGs, as well as the global review process.

### This SSR Backgrounder answers the following questions:

- ▶ What is the 2030 Agenda with its Sustainable Development Goals? [Page 2](#)
- ▶ Why is good SSG important for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda? [Page 3](#)
- ▶ What security targets are included in SDG 16? [Page 4](#)
- ▶ How does good SSG contribute to the achievement of SDG 16? [Page 4](#)
- ▶ How does good SSG relate to other SDGs in the 2030 Agenda? [Page 7](#)
- ▶ Why is local ownership of SSG/R central to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda? [Page 8](#)
- ▶ How is progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda reviewed? [Page 8](#)



### What is the 2030 Agenda with its Sustainable Development Goals?

The 2030 Agenda with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was adopted in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly. The Agenda does not aim to create legally binding standards, but instead seeks to advance international political goals in the form of “a plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity”, pledging that no one will be left behind.

Sustainable development has social, environmental, and economic pillars, which are all included in the SDGs. Addressing challenges that relate to poverty, health concerns, climate change, inequality, violence, and injustice, the 2030 Agenda is divided into 17 goals with 169 targets and more than 230 indicators. Each target has one or more indicators to streamline the measuring of

progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. To adapt the agenda to the national and local contexts, these need to be complemented by nationally defined indicators.

The SDGs are the successors to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a global campaign from 2000 to 2015 aspiring to fight a variety of poverty-related issues. The content and design of the SDGs were the result of a two-year-long global process that included public consultations, engagement with civil society, and multi-stakeholder negotiations. Small countries were given a strong voice in the debates, leading to the diversification of ideas and positions. This marked a significant improvement on the MDG process, which was spearheaded by UN agencies and donor countries without sufficient consultation. While the MDGs



Figure 1 Sustainable development



Note: The SDGs are interconnected and some may belong to more than one pillar.

focused on developing countries, the SDGs are intended to foster development through a universal, integrated, and indivisible approach. Another novelty in the 2030 Agenda is SDG 16, with its focus on the promotion of peace, justice, and strong institutions. It includes different targets calling to end violence, promote the rule of law, strengthen institutions and inclusive decision-making, and reduce corruption.

### Why is good SSG important for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda?

The 2030 Agenda recognizes that sustainable development goes hand in hand with peace and security, and that it is undermined by conflict. Likewise, the absence of sustainable development is a key driver of inequality, fragility, and conflict. The nexus between security and development has been made explicit through the inclusion of SDG 16 in the 2030 Agenda.

SDG 16 stresses the need for strong institutions that are built on respect for human rights, effective rule of law, and good governance at all levels. It is arguably one of the most ambitious goals in the 2030 Agenda because it is not simply a goal by itself but also an enabler for the achievement of other goals. However, many SDG 16 targets are rather vague, and limited guidance exists on how to measure and achieve them, especially in fragile contexts. Good SSG can be instrumental in providing guidance for the achievement of SDG 16 and its targets. It defines how the principles of good governance apply to public security provision, management, and oversight. The principles of good SSG are accountability, transparency, the rule of law, participation, responsiveness, effectiveness, and efficiency. Establishing good SSG is the goal of security sector reform.

For more information, please refer to the SSR Backgrounders on “Security Sector Governance” and “Security Sector Reform”.

### ► Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

- 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere
- 16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children
- 16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all
- 16.4 By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime
- 16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms
- 16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels
- 16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels
- 16.8 Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance
- 16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration
- 16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements
- 16.a Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime
- 16.b Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development

TARGET 16-1



REDUCE VIOLENCE EVERYWHERE

### What security targets are included in SDG 16?

The first and second targets of SDG 16 refer to the right of everyone to live their lives free from violence and abuse, emphasizing the need for special protection of women and children. The achievement of these targets is measured by both objective and perception-based criteria. The objective criteria include indicators such as the number of victims of homicide and conflict-related deaths, as well as the proportion of the population who have experienced physical, psychological, and sexual violence. The perception-based criteria include factors such as whether people feel safe in their neighbourhood.

TARGET 16-2



PROTECT CHILDREN FROM ABUSE, EXPLOITATION, TRAFFICKING AND VIOLENCE

TARGET 16-4



COMBAT ORGANIZED CRIME AND ILLICIT FINANCIAL AND ARMS FLOWS

SDG 16 also sets targets to combat organized crime and illicit arms flows. Both these issues have a detrimental impact on the security and stability of a state as they threaten the state monopoly over the legitimate use of coercive force.

SSG/R activities contribute to the achievement of these targets with their overarching goal of making the provision, management, and oversight of security more effective and more accountable in safeguarding state and human security.

### How does good SSG contribute to the achievement of SDG 16?

SDG 16 includes not only relevant targets relating to the aim of increasing state and human security but also important linkages to the principles and practices of good SSG.

#### Target 16.6: Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions

With SDG 16, the 2030 Agenda explicitly recognizes the importance of strong institutions for sustainable development. Weak and dysfunctional security and justice institutions perpetuate conflict, injustice, and human rights violations that affect the entire population, in particular those who are already marginalized. They erode public trust and threaten the legitimacy of government institutions overall.

Good SSG demands that the security sector has the structures, personnel, equipment, and resources necessary to fulfil the legitimate security needs both of the state and of individuals and communities. Relevant institutions for the security sector and its governance include security providers, such as the military, the police, intelligence services, border authorities, and private security companies, as well as ministries and the justice system. Good SSG also requires strong oversight actors, such as parliaments, ombuds institutions, and national audit offices, as well as the media and civil society organizations (CSOs). To ensure the functioning of institutions, SSR may involve legal and structural reforms and training on international norms and standards.

TARGET 16-6



DEVELOP EFFECTIVE, ACCOUNTABLE AND TRANSPARENT INSTITUTIONS



**Target 16.3: Promote the rule of law and ensure equal access to justice**

SDG target 16.3 calls for promotion of the rule of law at national and international levels. The rule of law is a principle of good governance whereby all people and all institutions are accountable to publicly known laws that are consistent with international human rights standards and are enforced fairly and independently. Good SSG requires that the security sector is subject to the rule of law.

Institutions that do not function according to legitimate laws are prone to arbitrariness and abuse of power, and are less capable of delivering public services to everyone. Where there is limited access to justice, conflicts remain unresolved and people cannot obtain protection and redress. SSR may therefore be implemented in combination with justice reforms and trainings for members of the judiciary.



**Target 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive and representative decision-making**

Strong institutions must be based on responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making, as specified in target 16.7. In order to be truly inclusive, it is important not only that a wide range of stakeholders participate but also that they are given the possibility and capacity to provide meaningful contributions to the governance of the security sector.

Parliaments can play a crucial role in legislating and overseeing the security sector. However, for them to fulfil this function, attention must be given to those who are frequently underrepresented, such as women and ethnic and religious minorities. SSG/R efforts to strengthen the role of parliaments may include disseminating knowledge on the legal and institutional tools for oversight and training members of security and defence committees.

For more information, please refer to the SSR Backgrounder on “Parliaments”.

**Target 16.b: Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development**

Inclusive decision-making also contributes to the achievement of target 16.b, which calls for the promotion and enforcement of non-discriminatory laws and policies. Discrimination is a breeding ground for social conflict and violence. Reducing discrimination in the security sector increases public trust and legitimacy, and supports the provision of security and justice. The goal should be that all people, regardless of their gender, age, religion, socioeconomic background, or other status, feel that they are represented, and that they are treated fairly and have their security needs addressed. SSG/R activities may include a review of existing security-related legislation and policies to ensure that laws are not discriminatory. Activities may also involve regular training of security providers on inclusivity and non-discrimination. Specific targets to achieve gender equality are set out in SDG 5.



TARGET 16-A



STRENGTHEN NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AND COMBAT TERRORISM AND CRIME

**Target 16.a: Strengthen relevant national institutions to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime**

A core objective of SSR is to prevent violent conflict by strengthening the capacities of national institutions responsible for security provision, management, and oversight. The indicator of target 16.a focuses on the strengthening of national human rights institutions (NHRIs). NHRIs and ombuds institutions can play an important role in resolving grievances and holding the security sector accountable, but they require relevant independence, expertise, and resources to fulfil their mandate.

For more information, please refer to the SSR Backgrounder on “Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces”.

TARGET 16-5



SUBSTANTIALLY REDUCE CORRUPTION AND BRIBERY

**Target 16.5: Substantially reduce corruption and bribery**

Corruption is a major impediment to good SSG, as it undermines institutions, participatory decision-making, and the rule of law. It also diminishes crucial resources for development and erodes people’s confidence in their governments. Target 16.5 calls for a substantial reduction of corruption and bribery in all their forms. However, addressing corruption requires breaking a vicious cycle. Corruption within the security sector inhibits the efficient functioning of actors, such as law enforcement officers and justice system officials, but these actors themselves are instrumental in fighting corruption. Combating corruption within the security sector is difficult given the sensitive nature of many topics. Therefore, there is a need for nuanced and long-term efforts to ensure that the security sector serves the society as a whole and that public funding is properly accounted for. These efforts include the creation and continuous strengthening of anti-corruption agencies and complaints procedures.

**Target 16.10: Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms**

Good SSG ultimately aims to ensure that security actors protect fundamental freedoms. The ability of oversight bodies to hold the security sector accountable to this aim requires public access to information. However, such access is often hindered by confidentiality concerns linked to sensitive national security issues. The online publication of security-related legislation, information relating to inspections, and criminal justice system databases is one measure that can increase transparency, public trust in institutions, and meaningful civil society engagement on security issues.

For more information, please refer to the SSR Backgrounder on “Civil Society”.

In conclusion, many principles and practices of good SSG are reflected in the various targets of SDG 16. Efforts leading to good SSG, therefore, play a vital role in achieving SDG 16. However, as the targets remain vague, they have to be translated into national contexts.

TARGET 16-10



ENSURE PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND PROTECT FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

### How does good SSG relate to other SDGs in the 2030 Agenda?

All of the SDGs are interlinked and cannot be implemented or evaluated in isolation. This is particularly true for SDG 16. Across the 2030 Agenda, 24 targets and 33 indicators of seven other SDGs contribute directly to peace, justice, and strong and inclusive institutions. These targets are also referred to as SDG 16+.

This means that SSG/R activities not only contribute to the achievement of SDG 16, but also to various other SDGs, as outlined below.



#### SDG 5. Gender equality

The mainstreaming of gender equality in security provision, management, and oversight is a key element of good SSG and contributes to the achievement of SDG 5. Increasing the recruitment of female staff in the police, the judiciary, and the military is vital in reaching vulnerable parts of a society, promoting access to justice, and preventing human rights violations.

For more information, please refer to the SSR Backgrounder on “Gender Equality”.



#### SDG 11. Sustainable cities and communities

SDG 11 calls for the creation of inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and communities. SSG/R activities in urban environments contribute, for instance, to the provision of universal access to safe and inclusive public spaces, in particular for vulnerable members of society.

For more information, please refer to the SSR Backgrounder on “Urban Safety and Security”.

#### SDG 17. Global partnerships

Security and justice reforms often require multi-stakeholder dialogues between representatives of a country’s government, the security sector, parliament, the judiciary, and civil society. SDG 17 calls for such multi-stakeholder approaches at both the national and international levels. While stressing the importance of respect for national political decisions, it highlights the need for enhanced policy coherence, international capacity building, and commitment to official development aid to achieve the SDGs. SSG/R activities are often carried out with extensive support from international actors, either through bilateral donor assistance or in the framework of cooperation with multilateral organizations. Furthermore, international discourse in the area of good SSG is vital for the promotion of norms, standards, and good practices.



### **Why is local ownership of SSG/R central to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda?**

The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs provide a universal framework, but they also recognize that countries differ in their challenges and resources. States are therefore called upon to develop their own strategies and to complement the SDGs with nationally defined indicators. This country-led approach, also referred to as localizing the SDGs, aims to take into consideration national realities and to foster ownership over the implementation process. It is not only government institutions that work on the implementation of the SDGs but also non-state actors, such as CSOs, the private sector, academia, and the media. Following the mantra of leaving no one behind, the implementation process requires inclusive participation if it is to succeed. Inclusivity means not only a diversity of actors but also ensuring benefits for all people, including vulnerable groups such as women, children, and minorities.

These approaches of national ownership and inclusive participation are also central tenets of good SSG. While SSG/R is grounded in international standards and benefits from international support, targets need to be adjusted to domestic structures and to the specific needs of individuals and communities. Efforts can only be sustainable if they are driven by national and local actors and are made a political priority, as part of broader institutional reforms.

Despite broad recognition of the need for sustainable development, states face a variety of challenges in the implementation process, such as instability, structural and political shortcomings, and a lack of sufficient know-how and resources. Furthermore, many states struggle with the statistical capacity to monitor all indicators of the SDGs.

### **How is progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda reviewed?**

Each year, progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda is discussed at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in New York under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). As part of this process, states are encouraged to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of their domestic progress at the national and subnational levels in achieving the SDGs. Given the central role of SDG 16 for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, it is essential that these reviews include national efforts to promote peace, justice, and strong institutions. States can volunteer to present the outcomes of these Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at the HLPF. Each year, states use this opportunity to share their successes, and sometimes challenges, in an effort to accelerate implementation of the SDGs globally.



## What to read next

### On the 2030 Agenda and SDG 16

- United Nations General Assembly  
**Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)**  
United Nations, 21 October 2015.
- DCAF  
**SDG 16 Project Homepage**  
Combined documents and outputs, available at [www.dcaf.ch/sdg16](http://www.dcaf.ch/sdg16)
- Geoff Burt  
**Security Sector Reform, Legitimate Politics and SDG-16**  
SSR 2.0 Brief No. 5. Kitchener, ON: Centre for Security Governance, 2016.

### On SDG16+

- Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies  
**Enabling the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda through SDG-16+: Anchoring Peace, Justice and Inclusion**  
New York: United Nations, 2019.
- Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies  
**The Roadmap For Peaceful, Just And Inclusive Societies – A Call to Action to Change our World**  
New York: Center on International Cooperation, 2019.

### On the security-development nexus in SSG/R

- Oya Dursun-Özkanca  
**The Nexus Between Security Sector Governance/ Reform and Sustainable Development Goal 16: An Examination of Conceptual Linkages and Policy Recommendations**  
SSR Paper 20. Geneva: DCAF, 2021.
- Albrecht Schnabel and Vanessa Farr (eds.)  
**Back to the Roots: Security Sector Reform and Development**  
DCAF. Münster: Lit Verlag, 2012.

### On gender equality

- Anna-Lena Schluchter, Lorraine A. Serrano and Megan Bastick  
**The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Security Sector and Gender Equality**  
in Gender and Security Sector Reform Toolkit, edited by Megan Bastick and Kristin Valasek. Geneva: DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN Women, 2019.

### On oversight actors of the security sector

- Benjamin S. Buckland and William McDermott  
**Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces: A Handbook**  
Geneva: DCAF, 2012
- Hans Born and Marc Bentinck  
**Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector**  
Brussels: European Parliament-OPPD, 2013.
- Eden Cole, Kerstin Eppert and Katrin Kinzelbach (eds.)  
**Public Oversight of the Security Sector: A Handbook for Civil Society Organizations**  
DCAF - UNDP, 2008.

### On the rule of law and SSR

- Christoph Bleiker and Marc Krupanski  
**The Rule of Law and Security Sector Reform: Conceptualising a Complex Relationship**  
SSR Paper 5. Geneva: DCAF, 2012.

### On urban safety

- Robert Muggah and John de Boer  
**Security Sector Reform and Citizen Security: Experiences from Urban Latin America in Global Perspective**  
London: Ubiquity Press, 2019.

## More DCAF resources

- DCAF publishes a wide variety of tools, handbooks, and guidance on all aspects of SSR and good SSG – including many offered in languages other than English – available free-for-download at: **[www.dcaf.ch](http://www.dcaf.ch)**
- The DCAF-ISSAT Community of Practice website makes available a range of online learning resources for SSR practitioners at **<http://issat.dcaf.ch>**

**DCAF, the Geneva Centre for Security Sector**

**Governance**, is an international foundation whose mission is to assist the international community in pursuing good governance and reform of the security sector. DCAF develops and promotes norms and standards, conducts tailored policy research, identifies good practices and recommendations to promote democratic security sector governance and provides in-country advisory support and practical assistance programmes.

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